

Bintou-Wéré, a Sahel opera

Bintou-Wéré or A Sahel Opera is a co-production between the Prince Claus Fund (Netherlands), the Mali Ministry of Culture and the Théâtre du Châtelet with the support of the Dutch Embassy in Mali, the Dutch National Postal Code Lottery and the Ford Foundation.





The story

A village in the Sahel.

Young people are disillusioned and have no hope in the future,

trapped as they are by drought, locusts, wars, natural disaster and other misfortunes.

Weary of life in Africa, they decide to leave and try to breach the barbed wire fences that separate the Sahel from Europe.

Bintou-Were, a former child soldier, is expecting a 'love child'. She decides to cross the barricades protecting the borders of Morocco and Spain along with several other people she has met in her chaotic life.

"Will there be 'right of asylum' for all those claiming paternity of the baby she is "carrying?"

As long as the baby does not arrive before the perilous attack on the barbed wire of Melilla...

As long as Diallo the people smuggler can see this Odyssey through to a conclusion.

And if we widen the horizon !

When the earth that was once so fruitful, becomes cracked and gasps under a leaden sun, When hope is caught in a mesh of sharp steel wire, the web of a crippled world that has become a wasteland.

When the sandbearing winds gather strength, blinding and covering the heaps of stricken cattle,

When, battered by winds and tides, weary of waiting, the downtrodden people decide to rise up and leave,

Build ladders in the desert and set out on their journey ! And the tops of the ladders are pointed to the stars, as if to conquer the moon.

Then from the depths of their courage comes a deep murmur on which the strident waves of pain have no effect. It speaks these words :

“Through our parched throats we sing the requiem of lost innocence

We cross the burning desert sands

We will fly over the voracious ocean waves

But we will go on...

We will go on, our hands bloodied by barbed wire

We will reach the fields of plenty

We will pass beyond Melilla, Ceuta, beyond the land

Because the land is also our land...

The land has already been conquered

And now all we have to do is live on it”

All the downtrodden people, the ladder people, intersect in this modern day odyssey - from the ethnic Fulani shepherd to the delinquent apprentice, jailed several times already, from the wife who follows her husband to the enigmatic people smuggler who is the kingpin of the

puzzle... those who follow the road to exile, encounter others returning and challenge each other with their songs. The Paris-Dakar Rally passes by this way like a hissing snake winding through the sand dunes...

Choirs and melodies are heard - the sound of the Sahel wind, the cricket, the water...

The wisdom of a glorious past rises into the sky, its deep, crystal notes recounting the tragic tale.

But here, the *Odyssey* borrows from hopscotch its heartless first throw - the stubborn desire to breach the vicious circle, to breakaway and return to the Sahel in a blaze of glory.

Bintou, enfant terrible, decides to throw her baby not towards to the fields of plenty, but towards the dignified fields of liberation.

Is she strong enough for her voice to be heard ?

Synopsis following the odyssey of the Ladder People

ACT I

Scene 1 a village market in the Sahel. Independence

Commemoration Day.

As the traders and clients come and go, bustling around, the storyteller, Jéli Kouyaté, appears. `

He sings of independence evoking the memory of former emperors and famous figures in the history of the Sahel. Local dignitaries arrive for the festival, which includes male and female choirs, traditional dances

with the dignitaries themselves dancing, led by Sarzan Ndiaye.

Scene 2 A dismayed Sarzan Ndiaye announces that the big baobab tree has lost all its leaves in one night. The community realises that the locusts have arrived. The alarm is sounded.

Scene 3 Bintou Were, a young woman and former child soldier bursts in, beating the sacred drum. She is accompanied by two young hunters. The crowd is dismayed. Jéli Kouyaté and Sarzan Ndiaye remonstrate with her. An insolent Bintou scorns them, accusing them of raping her when she was younger. The crowd boos the dignitaries. The mad old

lady is having a wonderful time. Another wave of locusts brings everyone back down to earth. The choir of women wonders why all natural disasters seem to take place in their area. Sarzan Ndiaye blames the modern world whilst Dramane Zié, the soothsayer, defends progress. Opinions are divided.



Scene 4 Baala, the young people's leader, insinuates that there is no future here and that they should emigrate to Europe. Diallo, the people smuggler, appears and offers to take those who want to go to new horizons. Bintou-Wéré begins a seduction dance to which Diallo is not immune.

Scene 5 Bintou-Wéré takes on one side some men who she accuses of having taken advantage of her. She announces that she is pregnant, but does not know who the father is. Diallo the people smuggler makes the most of the situation to emphasise the notion of the right of asylum. If the child were to

be born in Europe, the parents would benefit. They must move quickly before it is too late.

Scene 6 Bintou-Wéré's suitors claim paternity of the child she is carrying. She turns them away. Meanwhile, the soothsayer Dramane Zié sings the praises of women. Diallo the people smuggler becomes insistent, expounding his strategy. This delights the group of young people who are keen to leave the village. However much Sarzan Ndiaye and Jéli-Kouyaté try to dissuade them, the young people are set on leaving. Diallo leads the procession of emigrants.

Interval

ACT 2

Scene 1 A long walk across the desert. Ballet of ladders. The ladder people are tired and take a break. Diallo offers them ritual biscuits and demands payment for his services. The emigrants have very little money left, having given him everything.

Scene 2 Bintou-Wéré is due to give birth. Her suitors watch over her like guards, each in their own way. The ladder people talk, recalling the misadventures of other emigrants. Men and women who have been escorted back to the border appear. They explain how difficult it is to live in Europe and try to dissuade

the new emigrants. But nothing puts them off. The woman who is following her husband is categorical - Europe is an Eldorado, a land of plenty. Diallo, the people smuggler, proposes that those who have been turned away should try again. They refuse. Diallo again asks the ladder people to pay for his services - a shameless racket to which Bintou-Wéré reacts. Fata-Maya, one of Bintou-Wéré's suitors, gets involved and a violent confrontation between Fata-Maya and Diallo ensues. The ladder people only just avoid a deadly battle. The Sahel wind blows... and is quickly replaced by the sudden arrival of cars

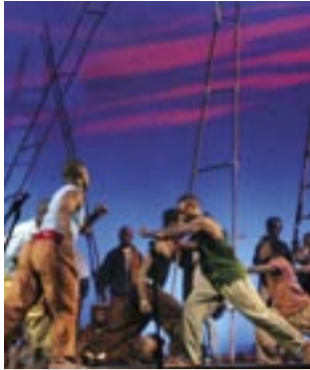
on the Paris-Dakar rally. MC Samafou and Bintou-Wéré are knocked down by the cars. Bintou is left for dead. MC Samafou dies.

Scenes 3, 4 and 5

The ladder people go into mourning. Different groups pass by, recognisable by their costumes. An animist choir, masks, Muslim choirs, catholic rituals etc.

Scene 6 A new setting. Out of time. The barbed wire fences can be glimpsed. The Spanish Civil Guard watch over the border, ready to deter the emigrants by any means, however harsh. The ladder people see Europe and rush towards the barbed

wire fences. As if in a dream, Bintou-Wéré goes in front on the highest ladder. Her baby is born on the ladder at the Europe-Africa border. She is faced with a major dilemma - does she throw the baby down into Europe (thus giving him or her right of asylum) or into Africa? Bintou throws the baby onto the African side and dies. Fata-Maya picks up the baby. The ladder people abandon their ladders and, as one, begin the journey back to Africa. Diallo, the people smuggler, alone at the foot of the giant ladder, broods about his disappointment.



AVEC

Djeneba Kone
Bintou-Wéré - Soprano
Ibrahim Loucard
Diallo - Bass
Kémoko Conde
Contralto
Abdoulaye Diabate
Jéli-Kouyaté - Baritone
Yves Thiam
Fata-Maya - Soprano
Zandougou Konate
Dramane Zié
Alto tenor
Issa Sory Bamba
MC Samafou - Soprano

AND
Siaka Kone - Baala
The young people's
leader
Blandine Yameogo
The woman who has
been turned away
Assitan Kida
The woman following
her husband
Moriba - Diabate

CHORUS

Andiliou Badie
André Dolly-
Mohungu
Raoul Diatta
Jeannette Nanou
Preira
Alain Kamate
Anna Diagne
Olga Albis
François Nioba Gomis
Diawoyé Soumano
Massétou Drame
Marc Baki
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Valékéba Véronique
Zoumanigui
Pévé Hélène Kalivogui
Kamassa Blandine
Guilavogui

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Bintou Bakayoko
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Mathieu Cyr
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Sanou
Ramatoulaye Sarr
Mamadou Sidibe
Adolphe Tebely
Henri Joel Sibi
Rokhaya Thioune

MUSICIENS

Bassékou Kouyate
ngoni, jéli-ngoni
Dian Diarra
kamalé-ngoni

David Daoro Bavogui
Guinean xylophone
Amadou Camara
bolon
Kindy Diallo
calebasse
Makan Camara
tundé
Idrissa Dembele
socu (Banbara violin)
Mamadou Kouyate
kora
Chérif Soumano
kora
Adamou Kanoute
dunumba
Nithié Diarra
Guinean harp
Mamadou Bassirou
Sanou - flûte, ngoni
Abdoulaye Diarra
doso-ngoni
Bathio Diarra
kamalé-ngoni
Demba Gadjigo - socu
Djalla Bore - djembé
Mor Dieng - sabar

Adramé Diop - sabar
Mamadou Thioune
sabar

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